

The Federal Diary

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Senate Backs Employee Bill of Rights

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Armtwisters who hound employees to buy bonds, or take part in outside political or social activities, and bosses who snoop into the personal or sex habits of underlings could be hauled into court and fined under a bill that sailed through the Senate yesterday.

The legislation, Sen. Sam J. Ervin's (D-N.C.) so-called Federal Employee Bill of Rights, now makes its way to the House, where it withered on the vine two years ago. Its fate will be decided by the degree of hostility and righteous indignation that can be mustered by the administration and top federal officials. Many contend the bill, with its tough penalties, isn't needed because there isn't any armtwisting and, besides, it can be handled administratively.

Officials of the Johnson administration first objected to the bill on grounds that it would be dangerous to security operations in intelligence gathering cutfits. Some surgery was performed, giving certain exemptions to the Cen-

tral Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and the FBI.

The next objections came because officials said the Ervin bill really wasn't needed, and would only make federal cases out of brushes between touchy employees and supervisors. Ervin, who has an amazing dossier of armtwisting complaints from workers, wasn't impressed and pushed ahead. But lack of House action—welcomed by the administration—killed the bill last session.

However, Ervin feels the House will take kindly to his bill this year, mainly because in the last election both political parties said they were opposed to invasions of privacy, even in government. Every major federal employee group, union and association, has backed the bill in public, and some officials have in private.

Backers of the bill figure that officials who oppose it because it isn't necessary just don't know what is happening within their own agencies. Ervin has become the lightning rod for complaints from federal employees—some ob-

viously crackpot, but most legitimate—about pressure, coercion, intimidation and heavy-handed tactics in many areas.

Contracting Out: The independent National Federation of Federal Employees says the government is wasting money through stepped up contracting out of housekeeping services. NFFE president Nathan T. Wolkomir says the jobs are being grabbed up by private contractors "as fast as the career civil servants who formerly performed the functions can be fired."

Wolkomir cited instances of industry taking janitorial services at federal installations in Vermont, Oregon, Maine, Connecticut, California, Missouri, Illinois and North Carolina.

Many federal officials are unhappy when they lose government cleanup crews because the theft problem often increases within agencies. Despite orders not to, managers under the gun to trim civilian payrolls find it easier to contract out work rather than try to have it done in-house with personnel who count against their job ceilings.

Veterans Administration's

Alumni Club will meet for lunch June 11 at the Charcoal Hearth. Deputy Associate Administrator Rufus H. Wilsor will be guest speaker.

National Postal Union members are voting by mail ballot for new officers. Most unions vote via the delegate system at convention, but NPU holds the one-man-one-vote contest before its semi-annual meeting which will be in St. Paul this summer.

Health Benefits: Congress has been asked to approve \$46.5 million this year to pay the government's share of the employee-annuitants health benefits program. That is \$5.1 million more than the past fiscal year. More than 2.1 million employees and 393,500 annuitants are enrolled in the program, and the number of retirees covered will jump nearly 42,000 by next year.